

Week Ending Friday, October 7, 1994

**Interview With Alan Colmes**

*September 30, 1994*

**Mr. Colmes.** President Clinton, very nice to meet you. I've been an unabashed supporter of yours for a very long time, to the point where my listeners call me up and accuse me of being on your payroll. I'd like to dispel any such myth right now. [Laughs]

**The President.** You're not on the payroll, but I appreciate what you've said.

**National Public Opinion**

**Mr. Colmes.** Thomas Jefferson said of democracy that "democracy is cumbersome, slow, inefficient, but in due time, the voice of the people will be heard and their latent wisdom will prevail." How latent is that wisdom at this point in our evolution?

**The President.** Well, I think what's going on in our country today is that people desperately want circumstances to change for themselves in their own lives, and they see things going on around them they don't like: high rates of crime and violence and drug abuse and family breakdown, the continued economic uncertainty and insecurity, a lot of working people worried about their incomes, their ability to finance their kids' education, the stability of their health care, their retirement. And they are not sure that the Government ever works for ordinary people. And I think that that plus the atmosphere in which we operate up here, which is so contentious and so full of the conflicting messages spawned by all the interest groups, make it difficult for anybody to communicate through that. But what I have to do is to just keep working for the American people, keep fighting for change.

You know, we've made a remarkable start, I think. It's just the beginning, but we've made a good beginning in restoring the economy and fighting crime and making this Government work for ordinary people. That's

what I got sent here to do, and that's what I'm trying to do.

**Midterm Elections**

**Mr. Colmes.** Midterm elections are coming up, and just the other day the Republicans had a photo-op at the Capitol, and they gave a 10-point plan. I wonder if you feel the American people will buy this and change the balance of power legislatively this November?

**The President.** Well, the Republican contract, it's—I'm so glad they did it because they finally told the American people what I knew all along, which is what they're for. What they're for is to go back to trickle-down economics. They made over a trillion dollars worth of promises to the American people in this contract. And how they're going to pay for it is either to explode the deficit again, after we brought it down, or to cut Medicare or Social Security or never pay for the crime bill.

It's the same old thing they did in the 1980's, and it poses a stark choice for the Americans in this election: Do you want to keep going forward with an economic plan that has brought the deficit down for 3 years in a row for the first time since Truman, helped to produce over 4.3 million new jobs, has got America ranked the most productive country in the world for the first time in 9 years, that's provided college loan relief for millions of Americans and done a lot of other things that are growing this economy? Or do you want to go back to the same old trickle-down economics that exploded the debt, reduced investment in people, and nearly wrecked this economy? I mean, that's basically what the choice is in this election.

And their contract, basically, is a contract on America, puts out a contract on the deficit, puts out a contract on Medicare, puts out a contract on the crime bill. I mean, they're going to wreck it all if they got to

implement these ideas. It's just—it's unbelievable, but it's really where they are.

**Mr. Colmes.** How successful do you think they'll be in their attempt to take over Congress?

**The President.** Well, if we can get out there and tell the American people the truth about our record, the fact that we have made a good start, that we've got a long way to go and this is no time to turn back, I think we've got an excellent chance to defy the experts and the pundits.

In all but three elections in this century, the incumbent President's party has always lost seats in at least one House of Congress. And I think there's only been one election, in 1934, when the incumbent President actually picked up seats in both Houses. So this is a natural rhythm, but what's going on now is the country is going through a lot of changes, people are having a tough time. They do not know what this administration has done to make our good first start. I'm going to get that out there, and they need to know that it's just the beginning, because a lot of people haven't felt it yet.

### **Health Care Reform**

**Mr. Colmes.** You've had an incredible string of accomplishments and perhaps the best first year legislatively of any President since Eisenhower. You've also cited Johnson's second year as a very successful year for him.

**The President.** Yes.

**Mr. Colmes.** But even your detractors, like Newt Gingrich, said you've had a great first year legislatively. Is it going to be more difficult in the second half of your first term, if there are more Republicans in Congress, for you to get things forth, like health care?

**The President.** Well, sure it is, unless they decide that they want to get something done for America instead of something done for their party.

**Mr. Colmes.** Is health care dead?

**The President.** No, not at all. Look, we didn't get it in the first year, and I think the main reason we didn't get it is that the Republicans decided they didn't want it to happen. I was willing to compromise; I reached out to them. But let me just give you the evidence.

When I introduced my plan, I said, "Look, folks, all I want to do is to help people control health care costs, protect the health insurance of people who have it so they don't lose it, and provide coverage for those who don't. Here's the best way to do it, I think. If you've got a better idea, let me know." When we started, there were 24 Republican Senators on a bill to provide health care for all Americans. They did it in a different way. When we got to the end of the legislative debate, that number 24 had dropped to zero.

Meanwhile, a Republican Congressman from Iowa said that the Republican leader in the House, Mr. Gingrich, had threatened them all that they must not cooperate. A Republican Senator was quoted in a major newspaper saying, "We killed health care; now we can't get our fingerprints on it." And the guy who gives them all their ideas, Mr. Kristol, said that the one thing you can't do is to pass health care reform while a Democrat is President; it'll ruin the party. So they put party ahead of the health care interests of the country.

But we can still get it. You know, things sometimes take longer around here. You just quoted Thomas Jefferson. I got the family leave bill on my desk to give people some time off from work without losing their job if a child is born or a parent is sick. It took 7 years for that. I had the opportunity to sign the Brady bill, which took 7 years to pass. The crime bill was around for 6 years. I signed a banking reform bill yesterday that's going to cut a billion dollars a year in regulatory costs, and it was around for 10 years.

So sometimes these bills take longer. I think we can get health care reform, but the Republicans are going to have to be willing to cooperate and put their country ahead of politics.

### **President's Approval Rating**

**Mr. Colmes.** Given these lists of accomplishments, is it incredibly frustrating for you when you see approval ratings not being where you feel they should be?

**The President.** Well, I think—no, I think it's absolutely understandable, because people can only vote on what they know and what they feel. And you know, this country—I'll say again, these social problems that we

have in our country, the crime, the family breakdown, the violence, the drugs, they've been developing over 30 years. The economic problems have been developing over 20 years. And the other party was in power for 12 years. I've been here 20 months. So, we've made a good step, but a lot of people haven't felt it.

And because I have tried to change so much so fast, all the news the American people get is dominated by the conflicts, the process, the interest groups and all that kind of stuff, and the intense partisanship of the opposition. This election gives us an opportunity, gives me an opportunity to go out there and say, "Hey, here's our record; here's what we've done; here's a good first start. They want to go back to trickle-down economics. You decide." Then the American people are the boss; let them decide.

### **Republican Opposition**

**Mr. Colmes.** Do you feel the intense opposition you talk about is stricter or more strident against you than it's been against other Presidents, and why?

**The President.** Well, I don't know the—a lot of the studies have said that this is the most highly partisan opposition that's ever been recorded. All I can tell you is what they've done. The Republican Senators voted 42 to 2 for the crime bill last year, when it wasn't an election year. And it came back this year, and they said all these prevention programs were pork. Well, they all voted for them last year, and they went from 42 to 2 for it, to 38 to 6 against it.

We've got an important piece of environmental legislation right now pending in the Senate—it's passed the House of Representatives—the Superfund bill for cleanup of toxic dumps. Everybody in America, believe it or not, from the Sierra Club to the chemical companies, is for this bill, from the most extreme environmental groups to the industry groups. The only people who are against it are the Republican Senators who don't want us to have one more legislative accomplishment before the election. That is the fact.

What I've got to do is just keep fighting for change, keep going forward. The American people are going to have to decide

whether they want to keep going on a path that is bringing the deficit down and the economy up, that's addressing crime, that has—unlike the Republicans who talked about this, we've actually reduced the size of the Federal Government, the Government's already 70,000 smaller than when I got here, and the law requires us now to take it down 270,000—or whether they're going to just go for that same old rhetoric where you promise everybody the moon and explode the deficit and run the economy into the ditch. Now that's the clear choice in this election, and it's the—I think the American people, once they have a chance to think about it, will have a different view.

### **Haiti**

**Mr. Colmes.** I would guess the most difficult decision a President would ever have to make would be whether or not to send young people in this country into war. As you've struggled over this, vis-a-vis the Haiti situation, what kind of internal conflict have you gone through?

**The President.** Well, I think first of all, the President's first responsibility is to the security and safety of the American people. At the end of the cold war when our interests, our—excuse me, our security doesn't seem so imminently threatened by nuclear weapons, I still have to work hard on that. That's what I worked hard with President Yeltsin on; that's why we're so engaged in these very tough negotiations with the North Koreans.

But there are other things that affect our interests as well as our values. And one of the things that makes us secure today is that nearly everybody in our neighborhood, that is, in the Caribbean and Latin America, are democracies, and they're trading with us and working with us, and they're going to help us move into the next century. There are only two exceptions, and Haiti is the only country where a democratically elected President was overthrown by military dictators who proceeded to launch a reign of terror.

So, I'd thought about it for a long time, and I worked for over a year and a half to give those people every single solitary opportunity to leave power peacefully, to restore democracy, to stop a flood of refugees com-

ing for this country, and to give that country a chance. Meanwhile, we fed a million Haitians every day, we sent medicine down there, and we exhausted all diplomatic alternatives. So that's—when I decided to use military force there, it was because I thought there was no other alternative. Having made the decision, I decided that I would give the peace mission a chance to go down there and tell them, "The President has made this decision. Now you have a decision about which way you are going to leave and under what circumstances and whether you are going to try and keep the country peaceful and whole."

I'm glad that the peace mission worked out, although, as you know, we already had over 60 planes in the air at the time that they finally agreed to leave. It was a difficult decision, but I thought in light of the human rights violations and the interest that we have in protecting our own borders and the interest we have in stability and democracy and growth in our area, it was the right one. And I might say, I'm very, very proud of what our soldiers have done there. If you look, just this week, we've got the Parliament meeting, the mayor has returned from hiding, electricity has been doubled, we've got refugees going back from Guantanamo to Haiti, and we started the gun buy-back program. So I feel good about what they're doing. You ought to be proud of them.

**Mr. Colmes.** What will happen if Cédras refuses to relinquish power, or if the Parliament doesn't vote the amnesty which is part of the pact that was made? What happens then?

**The President.** Well, the pact said that we would do our best to reconstitute the Parliament and encourage them to vote an amnesty bill but that, in any case, they would have to leave on October 15th, they would have to give up power, whether or not they got the amnesty bill in fact passed.

We committed to support the amnesty bill last year when Mr. Cédras came here and made his agreement with the United States and with Haiti and with the United Nations. And when the time came—and President Aristide put out the amnesty proclamation and told the Parliament he expected them to vote for it, and he would sign it. And when

the time came, he wouldn't leave. So a lot has happened between now and then, and they've got to work through this.

But I think the Parliament will do the right thing. I think that they will work through—they're debating not only whether to give it but what the terms of it ought to be, what the reach of it is. All these things are for the Haitians to resolve. But regardless, they are going to have to leave power.

**Mr. Colmes.** Is there a contingency plan in case Cédras doesn't leave, once again?

**The President.** Well, the contingency plan is that they will leave power on the 15th, regardless. That's what the United States is doing there.

**Mr. Colmes.** But there's no chance that Cédras will refuse to leave power?

**The President.** Well, I believe he will honor his agreement, but if he doesn't, he'll have to leave anyway.

**Mr. Colmes.** A lot of people who otherwise are supportive of taking democracy and helping to install it in a place like Haiti have problems with the fact that the spearhead at the top of this is Aristide and that he does not represent the best hope for democracy—he's been called a Marxist, he's been accused of necklacing—and that even those who might support such a policy toward Haiti have a more difficult time because of who the person is who's President of Haiti.

**The President.** I think he would say that given the long history of violence and bloodshed and all the animosity that existed in Haiti at the time he became President, he may have said some things, or his supporters may have said some things that they would just as soon not have said. But the international human rights monitors who have been in Haiti say that during the months when he was President, the human rights record in Haiti was better than it was before he became President and much better than it's been since he left office.

Moreover, in the years he's been out of Haiti, he has made repeated, consistent commitments to avoid violence, avoid retribution, avoid human rights violations. Furthermore, keep in mind, this time when he goes back into power, he will have forces from 29 or 30 countries there monitoring the situation, preventing human rights violations. And if he

wants to succeed as President, which I believe he does, he needs the international aid package and the help in conducting parliamentary elections, all of which require an observance of human rights and not abusing the rights and interests and the lives of the minority.

So I think the American people and the people of the world can have a pretty high level of confidence that President Aristide will do what he says. So far, in all my dealings with him, he has kept every commitment he has made. And that's all you can ask of anybody. And he's made an ironclad commitment that he will not support violence.

### ***The Presidency***

**Mr. Colmes.** Mr. President, I know your time is limited, and I thank you very much for spending some time with us, but you know, I do have to in conclusion ask a really tough question. Is being President fun? Are you having a good time doing this?

**The President.** Yes, I am. Believe it or not, it's not all—when people's lives are at stake, it's not always fun. When you're fighting a tough battle where you think you're fighting for something good and you're willing to compromise with the other side and they're playing politics, that's not always fun.

But it is a real joy and a profound honor to just have the opportunity to come into this office every day and try to stick up for ordinary Americans and fight their fight and make their lives a little better. And whether they know it or not is not so important; it's not so important what they think of me on a daily basis. What is important is that I think of them on a daily basis, that I keep fighting for them. And I think the end will bring us out all right.

**Mr. Colmes.** How do you get them to know that, though, so they appreciate what they may not know about your day-to-day machinations?

**The President.** In part, that's what the elections are all about. That's what interviews like this are all about. I have to—I may have worked too hard on too many things for the last 2 years and spent too little time trying to directly communicate. I've worked hard at it, but I'm going to work even harder.

But the main thing is that I show up for work every day and fight other people's fights. And then when elections come, I go out and make a report to the people; they make their own judgment.

**Mr. Colmes.** Thank you very much, sir, for communicating here with us and our audience.

**The President.** Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 2:40 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

## **Proclamation 6729—Child Health Day, 1994**

*September 30, 1994*

*By the President of the United States of America*

### **A Proclamation**

It has been said that “(i)n every child who is born . . . the potentiality of the whole human race is born again.” Since James Agee wrote those words in 1941, generations of children have been born into our world, each individual holding as much promise and potential as the children of ages past. In recent decades, children have grown up to see the human race produce a vaccine for polio and pull back from the precipice of nuclear war. Indeed, in many ways, the world is a much safer place for all of us. It would seem that today's children would have a better chance than ever to fulfill the tremendous potential of humanity.

Yet as we celebrate Child Health Day this year, our young people face challenges to their well-being that their grandparents and great-grandparents could scarcely have imagined. In virtually every school and community, drugs and guns threaten our youths' safety, and gangs have become the closest thing to family that many young people will ever know. Girls too young to be mothers are struggling to meet the demands of parenthood, and many boys too young to be fathers are turning from the profound responsibilities they should shoulder. Among the primary health risks confronting our young